



SOCIAL MEDIA USE, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND MARITAL INFIDELITY AMONG MARRIED PERSONS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *It is usually an expectation of couples to have a peaceful marital life for as long as they live. However, the relationship may not turn out to be as seamless as expected. This study examines the influence of social media use and intimate partner violence (IPV) on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 867 respondents across four major locations in Benue State. The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the data, utilising simple linear regression and multiple regression techniques to test the hypotheses. The results revealed that social media use and intimate partner violence are significant predictors of marital infidelity, with social media use exhibiting a moderate positive influence ($\beta = 0.262$) and intimate partner violence demonstrating a stronger effect ($\beta = 0.655$). The model explained 71.3% of the variance in marital infidelity, with both predictors contributing significantly to the outcome ($p < .001$). Based on these findings, it is recommended that intervention programs focusing on responsible social media use and addressing intimate partner violence within relationships be implemented in the region. Couples should be encouraged to engage in counselling and communication strategies to foster trust and reduce the negative impacts of digital and abusive behaviours. Additionally, public policy and legal reforms targeting IPV protection are necessary to support individuals at risk and enhance marital stability.*

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Marital Infidelity, Married Persons.



INTRODUCTION

Marriage is widely recognised as a union between two individuals who agree to establish and nurture a family. It serves as a vital institution for procreation, caregiving, education of children, and societal stability (Nwanekwu & Uba, 2024). Beyond its traditional functions, marriage also provides emotional support, companionship, and economic security while fostering love and shared interests. Despite its importance, the dynamics of marriage have evolved significantly due to societal changes, including the pervasive influence of technology and social media (Ogwokhademhe & Ishola, 2013). In today's world, social media has become an integral part of human interactions, reshaping how individuals communicate, form connections, and sustain relationships. While it offers opportunities for enhanced communication and access to information, it also introduces challenges to marital relationships. Social media platforms have become both facilitators of connection and sources of conflict (Eke et al., 2024). They may inadvertently expose couples to risks such as diminished trust, emotional distance, and infidelity. Marital infidelity, a major cause of relationship breakdowns, is increasingly linked to social media use (Odenigbo et al., 2024). Platforms designed for networking can sometimes lead to secretive behaviours, rekindled past relationships, or the temptation to engage in extramarital affairs. Social media may also create unrealistic expectations by promoting idealized relationships that undermine satisfaction with one's spouse (Ehoro & Badey, 2021). Vogels and Anderson (2020) noted that when trust and mutual respect are eroded, the risk of marital instability, including infidelity, separation, or divorce, increases. In addition to infidelity, intimate partner violence (IPV) is another critical issue that affects marital relationships. IPV encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, often triggered by conflicts, jealousy (Okedare & Fawole, 2024), or power imbalances within relationships. The intersection of IPV and social media is becoming increasingly evident. For instance, social media can amplify controlling behaviours (Tandon et al., 2020), such as constant surveillance of a partner's online activity, digital harassment, or public shaming. The question of how social media impacts relationships and other areas of life is increasingly relevant.

While social media can help individuals stay connected with loved ones, discover wedding ideas, network, and make new friend, it can also influence offline realities by shaping online lifestyles (Odenigbo et al., 2024; Seidman, 2019; Demirtas-Madran, 2018). These behaviours contribute to marital discord and undermine the emotional well-being of both partners (Obi & Ezennwanne, 2023). The impact of social media on intimate relationships in Benue State, Nigeria, cannot be overlooked. In this region, cultural and societal expectations often shape marital dynamics. However, according to Ehoro & Badey, 2021, the advent of social media and traditional norms are being challenged, leading to new dimensions of conflict, infidelity, and intimate partner violence. Married persons in Benue State are not immune to these influences. The use of social media has introduced complexities in how couples communicate, manage conflicts, and maintain intimacy (Eke et al., 2024).



CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Marital Infidelity

Pace (2020) noted that infidelity in marriage is perceived differently by individuals, a view supported by Rada (2012), who asserted that partners in the same relationship may hold varying definitions of what constitutes infidelity or an extramarital affair. This diversity in perspectives makes defining infidelity complex. This complexity is further exacerbated by cultural values and gender perception of the concept. Marital infidelity poses a significant threat to marital stability, as evidenced by the National Opinion Research Center (2013), which found rising infidelity rates among women. Cheating among Nigerian women is a relatively recent phenomenon, contrasting with earlier decades when women were more faithful, patient, and tolerant. Globally, infidelity and domestic violence are pervasive issues, with approximately two million spouses experiencing abuse annually (American Medical Association). Despite legal frameworks addressing violence against women (United Nations, 2021), these societal challenges persist (Idoko, 2018).

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which is largely referred to as domestic violence is a universal concern within households that has garnered significant research attention, especially among psychologists and other stakeholders. This attention aims to reduce the devastating effects of IPV on married individuals, their children, and society (Ehoro & Badey, 2021). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) defines domestic violence as abusive behaviour within marriage, family, dating, or cohabiting relationships, including sexual abuse, physical assault, economic exploitation, and psychological abuse. Its severity and frequency vary across countries and cultures (Okorie et al., 2020).

Although domestic violence affects people across racial, religious, national, and social class boundaries, women are disproportionately impacted (WHO, 2013; Subhashchandra et al., 2022). IPV is a growing public, social, and academic concern, especially among married individuals (Bjornholt & Hjemdal, 2018), with feminist and sociological literature emphasizing its global prevalence as one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women (UN Women, 2015). IPV encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviours, including partner assault, wife battering, coercive control, rape, and forced drug use. Victims suffer both physical and mental health consequences, such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and physical deformities (Bjornholt & Hjemdal, 2018; Hamby, 2017).

According to Akaba and Abdullahi (2020), IPV can result in chronic pain, gynaecological issues, and even death. IPV is a critical public health issue with wide-reaching implications for individuals, families, and society, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Sardinha et al., 2022; John et al., 2022). While both men and women experience IPV, women are more often victims, and men are frequently the primary perpetrators (WHO, 2013; NDHS, 2013). Despite the Nigerian government's 2015 ratification of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, IPV remains a significant issue among married individuals in Nigeria.



Social Media

Social media plays a significant role in contemporary communication, and its impact on various aspects of human interaction is increasingly scrutinized. Dollarhide (2021) defines social media as computer-based technology designed to facilitate the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Similarly, Kudumula (2022) describes social media as platforms that enable the sharing of media, such as pages, videos, or text, in various formats. These platforms are internet-based and allow users to communicate electronically, sharing personal information, documents, videos, and photos via computers, tablets, or smartphones through web-based software or applications (Dollarhide, 2021).

Kudumula (2022) identifies several types of social media platforms: Social networking sites, which focus on personal interactions and allow users to connect with friends and family (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter); image-based platforms, such as Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat, which are designed for sharing visual content; video-sharing and streaming platforms like YouTube; and discussion forums like Quora and Reddit, which are essential for asking questions and receiving diverse answers. Social media has become an integral part of daily life for individuals of all ages, including married people (Zabadi, 2019), and serves multiple purposes, such as work, education, information gathering, communication, and cultural interaction (Stanislaw, 2015).

Both Facebook and Twitter, two of the most popular social networking platforms, boast over 100 million users each (Gull et al., 2019). Social media platforms tend to showcase curated content that highlights only positive aspects of users' lives, leaving out personal struggles or challenges. When someone feels dissatisfied or insecure in their relationship, they might view another person's seemingly perfect life online, assuming that the grass is greener elsewhere. However, these perceptions are often far from reality, and social media can distract individuals from their interpersonal relationships, making it harder to live in the moment (David, 2019). As a result, social media contributes significantly to infidelity in modern marriages. Furthermore, poor management of social media use can severely harm marital stability and family cohesion (Gull et al., 2019; Alanazi, 2021; Savoie, 2021; Jarai, 2022; Rozgonjuk et al., 2019).

Married individuals may spend significant time curating an idealized image of their relationship on social media, which can detract from nurturing the actual relationship. This dynamic can lead to unhealthy comparisons and inflated expectations of what partnerships should be (Dhir et al., 2019). Additionally, social media use has been linked to depression and negative body image, both of which can adversely affect relationships (Dhir et al., 2018, 2019). When one partner's online activity begins to alter the relationship dynamics, it raises concerns (Dhir et al., 2020). While social networking has the potential to strengthen romantic relationships, it can also weaken them, contributing to feelings of envy or resentment when partners engage with others online. Research highlights Facebook as a significant contributor to modern infidelity, with individuals spending an average of 50 minutes per day on the platform, which remains one of the most widely used social media platforms globally (Beyens et al., 2016).

Prolonged engagement with social media by married couples can also lead to social media addiction (Abbasi & Drouin, 2019; Jomy, 2019), which exacerbates these challenges. Social



media addiction occurs when frequent attention to social media interferes with an individual's effective functioning in important areas of life, often leading to loneliness and depression (Demircioglu & Goncu Kose, 2021). Social media also has the potential to affect intimacy, perceived social support, and sexual functioning within relationships, sometimes leading to sexual stress and dysfunction (Alimoradi et al., 2019). Couples who engage with social media may also tempt themselves into practicing social media infidelity (Aydin et al., 2018). This occurs when a partner has romantic or sexual affairs with others on social media.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate social media use and intimate partner violence on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The following specific objectives will be considered to:

- i. examine social media as influence of marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
- ii. ascertain intimate partner violence as influence of marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
- iii. determine if social media and intimate partner violence jointly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were stated to guide this study.

- i. To what extent will social media influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria
- ii. What is the extent to which intimate partner violence (IPV) influences marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
- iii. To what extent will social media and intimate partner violence (IPV) jointly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

Empirical Studies

Social Media and Marital Infidelity

Nwanekwu and Uba (2024) investigated the impact of social media on infidelity among married men in Imo State, using a survey methodology. They targeted a population of 5,408,800, with a sample size of 400 determined through the Taro Yamane formula. A multistage sampling technique was used, and questionnaires served as the primary data collection tool. The results indicated that 44.98% of respondents attributed infidelity among married men to social media, while 36.24% believed it could be mitigated through social media. Furthermore, 54.24% identified Facebook as the platform most commonly used for infidelity. The study concluded that social media contributes to infidelity but can also be used to mitigate such behaviors, with Facebook being the dominant platform.

Eke et al. (2024) examined how digital intimacy interference affects marital stability among couples in Rivers State, using social penetration theory and social network interference



theory. They employed a descriptive survey design and targeted a population of 1,404,855. A multistage sampling method led to 384 respondents, and data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, including the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed that digital media disrupts marital intimacy, reducing conversation quality and diverting attention from physical affection. Further, Obi and Ezennwanne (2023) explored the impact of social media on marital relationships among couples at Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Nigeria. The study found that social media positively influenced family cohesion but also distracted from spousal communication.

Zabadi (2019) discovered that married couples frequently access social networking platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, and dedicate a substantial portion of their time to these sites. Similarly, Afolaranmi (2020) highlighted that as more time is allocated to social media use, couples experience a reduction in the time spent together. Social media platforms (SMPs) like Facebook and Instagram have been shown to yield positive effects, such as fostering a heightened sense of well-being by alleviating negative emotions (Rozgonjuk et al., 2019) and enhancing self-esteem (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Additionally, social media platforms have been commended for their capacity to nurture relationships (Daspe et al., 2018) and sustain social capital (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). These perceived benefits have significantly contributed to the widespread adoption of SMPs globally, making their usage an essential aspect of everyday life (Baccarella et al., 2018).

Ehoro and Badey (2021) emphasised the numerous benefits of a healthy marriage, including physical, mental, financial, social, and sexual advantages, as well as positive societal outcomes. However, the increasing prevalence of separation, divorce, and broken homes has raised concerns about financial stability, mental health, work satisfaction, child development, and the integrity of the marriage institution. Social media has consistently been highlighted as a contributing factor to marital instability (Ehoro & Badey, 2021). Using the social network interference theory (SNIT), the study examined the implications of social media use on new marriages through a cross-sectional survey design involving 200 conveniently selected respondents from Port Harcourt City. Data were gathered via self-designed questionnaires and analysed descriptively. The findings revealed that many respondents experienced infidelity-related issues due to social media use. Other participants reported that social media contributed to domestic violence, reduced communication levels, disputes, and separation.

Obeng et al. (2023) explored social media usage among married couples in a Ghanaian residential community. Utilising a descriptive survey design, a non-probability convenience sampling approach, and a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 30 couples (60 individuals) in a specific residential area in Ghana to assess the significance of social media in marital relationships. The study employed percentages and frequency tables for data analysis. The findings indicated that, although social media could foster adverse behaviours such as jealousy among couples, it also serves as a platform for expressing love, romance, and mutual care. Consequently, the study concluded that social media is a beneficial communication tool for relationships when used positively and thoughtfully.

In the same vein, Abbasi (2018) further highlighted the adverse effects of technology on marital relationships, noting that the pervasive use of gadgets has diminished the traditional practice of spending quality time with a partner. Historically, couples found joy and bonding through shared activities such as attending concerts, plays, social gatherings, and visiting friends. These interactions fostered healthy communication, intimacy, and fondness within



marriages. However, the invasion of technology has caused individuals to prioritize their gadgets over their relationships, jeopardizing the foundation of marital bonds.

Kuske (2020) found that couples in long-distance relationships often use user-friendly social media platforms to maintain their connections. However, there are significant drawbacks to social media use, including reduced quality time with loved ones and relationship dissatisfaction. These negative outcomes are often linked to pre-existing relationship issues or psychological conditions (Talwar et al., 2019). Spending more time communicating online and managing daily tasks in cyberspace may result in reduced physical interaction, a significant concern for many couples (Hallet & Moore, 2020). Estimates indicate that over 3 billion people worldwide actively use social media, spending an average of 136 minutes per day on these platforms (Statista, 2019; GlobalWebIndex, 2020; Tregoning, 2020). This widespread use has spurred academic interest in understanding the effects of social media, particularly its negative consequences, often referred to as the “dark side of social media” (Tandon et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2019).

Intimate Partner Violence and Marital Infidelity

Some studies (Oginyi et al., 2020; Subhashchandra et al., 2022) have investigated various factors contributing to domestic violence in Nigeria. These include psychological well-being, personality traits, psychological distress, alcohol abuse, religion, education level, marital satisfaction, sexual autonomy, marital infidelity, and socioeconomic status (Agboola & Ojo, 2022). Kwanga et al. (2023) evaluated the vulnerability of gender-based physical spousal domestic violence in Benue State, Nigeria, using secondary data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) (2018) conducted by the National Population. The results showed that 77.4% of respondents had experienced various forms of physical violence. The perceived reasons for physical violence included suspected infidelity (18.4%), husband's womanizing (18.4%), and disobedience (15.3%), alcohol consumption by the husband (9.3%), poverty (9.1%), and suspected infertility (9.1%). Specific forms of violence reported included being slapped by husbands (16.4%), having objects thrown at them (8.4%), being kicked and dragged (16.1%), and being pushed and shaken (19.7%). A smaller proportion (2.9%) reported being threatened or attacked with a weapon. Among married women experiencing spousal physical violence, 61.3% sustained injuries, including cuts/bruises (40.9%), eye injuries (23.1%), dislocations/fractures (12.4%), deep wounds (14.5%), and broken teeth (4.3%). The study also found that women sought help from their own family (71%), their husband's family (21%), and religious leaders (8%).

Earlier, in Nigeria, studies such as the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey (2013) have reported high rates of IPV, with approximately one in four women having experienced such violence (Benebo et al., 2018). Extensive research has explored the causes, risk factors, and forms of IPV experienced by women (Ajayi et al., 2022; Benebo et al., 2018), often Utilising cross-sectional analysis methods and the ecological model to explain why women remain in abusive relationships (Benebo et al., 2018). Normative beliefs that condone violence have been identified as significant predictors of IPV in Nigeria (Linos et al., 2013). Individual factors such as low self-esteem, poor parental upbringing, aggressive behaviour, substance abuse, early exposure to abuse, and financial difficulties have been linked to IPV (Akaba & Abdullahi, 2020). Social and cultural factors also play a substantial role in fostering IPV (Akaba & Abdullahi, 2020) and norms that justify male authority to discipline their wives often perpetuate acceptance of IPV.



Coll et al. (2020) highlighted the global prevalence of domestic violence, particularly in developing countries, where the lifetime incidence ranged from 5% in Armenia and Comoros to 40% in Afghanistan. In Papua New Guinea, the United Nations Population reported prevalence rates of 46.1% in 2015 and 47.6% in 2018. In Africa, exposure to domestic violence remains high, with reported rates of 80% in Kenya, 69% in Morocco, and 49% in Jordan (United Nations, 2021). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 48% of women in Nigeria have reported experiencing various forms of domestic violence (United Nations, 2021). Media platforms have increasingly reported disturbing cases of domestic violence. For example, on April 1, 2022, in Lagos, Nigeria, a man allegedly burned his wife to death upon her return from Scotland (Usman, 2022). Similarly, on April 8, 2022, a prominent Nigerian gospel singer was reported to have died due to domestic violence (Ochogwu, 2022). On July 20, 2022, in Osun State, Nigeria, a woman allegedly set her husband on fire following a disagreement (Adeyemo, 2022). These incidents underscore the severe consequences of domestic violence among married individuals in Nigeria, with physical and psychological impacts, including injuries, disability, anxiety, drug abuse, depression, sleep problems, hypertension, and suicide (Okorie et al., 2020).

Okedare and Fawole (2024) explored the impact of social support on the experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married and cohabiting young women living in urban slums of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study utilised a community-based household survey conducted across ten slum communities in five local government areas of Ibadan municipality, engaging 314 young women as participants. The average age of respondents was 22.25 ± 1.75 years, and the mean spousal age difference was 7.15 ± 3.87 years. Most respondents were married (62.1%) and had been in their union for 0–4 years (68.8%). Over half (56.4%) justified IPV perpetration, with the majority having experienced psychological IPV (66.6%) and at least one form of IPV (86.3%); however, 58.1% had never disclosed their IPV experiences to anyone. The findings identified social support as a predictor for psychological IPV and any form of IPV but not physical IPV. Both the type of union and duration of union were significant predictors of all forms of IPV, with IPV prevalence higher among cohabiting women. The study concluded that social support from family and friends is essential in helping abused women cope with IPV experiences and recommended that IPV prevention efforts focus on strengthening the social support systems available to victims.

Further, a national demographic and health survey revealed that approximately one-third of Nigerian women have experienced physical violence, such as battering, marital rape, and murder, at the hands of their spouses (Udobang, 2018). Olasupo (2023) explored psychological factors predicting domestic violence, examining the role of work and family conflicts among married individuals in Osun State, Nigeria. The study involved 220 participants (Mean age = 35.40, SD = 5.87, Females = 58.6%), who completed the Domestic Violence Scale (DVS), Work and Family Conflict Scale (WFCS), and Religiosity Scale (RS). Hierarchical regression analysis revealed a significant predictive effect of family-to-work conflict (FWC) on domestic violence. Additionally, religiosity significantly predicted domestic violence. Mediation analysis using Hayes PROCESS Macro demonstrated that the link between FWC and domestic violence was partially mediated by religiosity, with significant total, direct, and indirect effects. The study concluded that FWC directly impacts domestic violence, with religiosity playing a significant mediating role in this relationship. In another study, Agboola and Ojo (2022) examined the relationship between domestic violence and marital infidelity, noting that domestic violence occurs in many homes and often involves



sexual assault, emotional abuse, and physical violence, though the extent varies across societies. The study randomly selected 150 respondents, who completed questionnaires analysed using simple percentage and chi-square methods. Results revealed a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and domestic violence. The findings suggested that mistrust by men toward their wives and neglect by husbands contributes to domestic violence in homes.

Ubelejit-Nte and Nwakanma (2023) examined the experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among women in Nigeria and the reasons why women justify enduring IPV in marriage. The cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving 400 respondents from various states in Nigeria selected through non-probability sampling. Data collection utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods, and analyses were conducted at univariate and bivariate levels. The findings revealed, at a p-value of .0256 ($p < .05$), a positive correlation between societal biases, cultural and religious ideals, and women's acceptance and endurance of IPV. Additionally, 70.5% of respondents believed that enduring IPV in marriage aligns with cultural and religious expectations, since leaving an abusive marriage is perceived as unacceptable. Other reasons for enduring IPV included the stigma of failed marriages, financial dependency, and the responsibility of raising children.

Domestic violence prevalence in Nigeria is further highlighted by reports from Toluwani (2017), which recorded 852 cases in Lagos State between January and September 2017. Accordingly, Audu et al. (2015) conducted a cross-sectional community-based descriptive survey to assess the prevalence of domestic violence among married women in Oiji ward, a rural area in Benue State, North Central Nigeria. Results showed that 67.2% of respondents had experienced domestic violence, including physical assaults (19.5%) and emotional/mental torture (30.2%). Key predictors of domestic violence included the age of the women {OR= 3.191, (95% CI = 2.002-5.087) $p=0.000$ }, age at marriage {OR= 1.027, (95% CI = 0.508- 2.073)}, forced marriage {OR= 0.0136, (95% CI = 0.084-0.221) $p=0.000$ }, monthly income {OR= 1.665, (95% CI = -1.081-2.564) $p=0.001$ }, and freedom of sexual expression {OR= 3.917, (95% CI = 1.999 – 7.676) $p=0.000$ }. The study also highlighted the severe underreporting of IPV cases in Nigeria, as evidenced by the Domestic Violence in Nigeria report (2016), which found that 97.2% of women do not report IPV incidents to law enforcement due to the trivialization of such cases as private matters. The findings underscored how gendered institutional frameworks, socialization, stereotypes, and prejudices exacerbate women's vulnerabilities to IPV, with many suffering in silence due to complacency, societal tolerance of violence, and the inability of legal systems to provide adequate protection.

It is worthy of note that while more women suffer from partner violence than men, the percentage of men having unpleasant marital experiences from their spouses may be on the increase. Traditional values may be responsible for concealing occurrences and underreportage.



Social Media, Intimate Partner Violence and Marital Infidelity

Odenigbo et al. (2024) investigated the level of awareness among internet users about social media messages on Domestic Violence Against Children, Men, and Women (DVACMW), the knowledge gained from these messages, and the users' attitudes toward DVACMW based on the messages. The study adopted a survey research design, with a population of 14,684,504 adult internet users in Southeast Nigeria. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire, and analysis was performed using percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that 100% of respondents were aware of DVACMW, with the primary platforms for awareness being Facebook (75.3%), Instagram (14.0%), Twitter (8.5%), and TikTok (0.8%). The regularity of reading social media messages on DVACMW varied, with responses ranging from daily (22.0%), weekly (30.5%), biweekly (8.8%), and monthly (9.5%) to rarely (29.3%). The study further revealed a high knowledge level ($X=3.65$ to 2.84) for up to 90% of the knowledge indicators studied. The messages significantly influenced respondents' attitudes ($X=3.43$ to 2.66) for up to 90% of the attitude indicators. .

Asadu and Egbuche (2020) investigated public perceptions of the effects of marital infidelity on families in Ihe/Owerre, Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. Using a multistage sampling technique, cluster and simple random sampling methods were employed to select 167 respondents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and complemented by in-depth interviews. Findings indicated that marital infidelity often led to divorce, with men more frequently engaging in infidelity. Educated individuals and civil servants were more likely to commit infidelity, which was primarily driven by financial challenges.

Also, Ekweani et al. (2023) examined the prevalence and patterns of intimate partner violence (IPV) among antenatal clinic attendees at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abuja. Data collected included respondents' socio-demographics, experiences, types of IPV, and health problems arising from IPV. The mean age of respondents was 29.37 ± 4.43 years, with Igbo being the predominant ethnic group (46.5%). Most participants were married (96.56%), had tertiary education (68.06%), and were in their third trimester (49.14%). The combined incidence of IPV among participants was 17.69%, with physical violence accounting for 3.19%. The most affected body part was the head region (40%), and 34% of respondents reported previous experiences of intrauterine fetal death due to IPV. Age and marital status emerged as the two most significant factors for IPV, both at $P = 0.0001$.

The fact that most of the cited studies were conducted outside Benue State implies a significant gap in the geographic and cultural scope of existing research on the relationship between social media use and marital dynamics, instability and/or infidelity. It further implies a lack of localised research exploring the impact of social media on marital relationships within the specific cultural and social context of Benue State. This highlights the need for contextually relevant studies to understand how regional differences may influence the interplay between social media usage and marital dynamics.



Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by George C. Homans (1958). Social Exchange Theory posits that human relationships are formed and maintained based on a cost-benefit analysis. People seek to maximise rewards and minimise costs in their interactions. This theory posits that human relationships operate through a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals aim to maximise rewards while minimizing costs. In intimate relationships, this dynamic significantly influences behaviours, perceptions, and decisions, particularly in the context of conflict and infidelity.

Thus, social media acts as a platform that alters the cost-benefit structure of intimate relationships. Social media platforms facilitate interactions that challenge traditional relationship boundaries, providing opportunities for extramarital engagements and emotional connections outside the marital context. These platforms reduce the perceived costs of infidelity—such as the risk of detection and the effort required to establish new connections—while amplifying potential rewards, including emotional validation and novelty.

As a result, social media use can increase the likelihood of marital infidelity, either by enabling direct interactions or by fostering dissatisfaction with the primary relationship when partners compare their lives to idealized portrayals online. Therefore, social media's accessibility and openness may provoke feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and mistrust within marital relationships. When one partner perceives inequity or an imbalance in emotional investment due to social media interactions, it may lead to negative reactions, including controlling behaviours or violence. Intimate partner violence, in this context, can be understood as a maladaptive attempt to restore perceived balance or assert control within the relationship.

The theory underscores how digital interactions can redefine relationship norms and influence decision-making processes, often with significant social and psychological consequences. This perspective is crucial in understanding the dynamics of intimate relationships in the digital age, particularly in culturally diverse and evolving societies such as Benue State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses of the study

1. Social media use will significantly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Intimate partner violence (IPV) will significantly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
3. Social media use and intimate partner violence (IPV) will jointly and significantly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

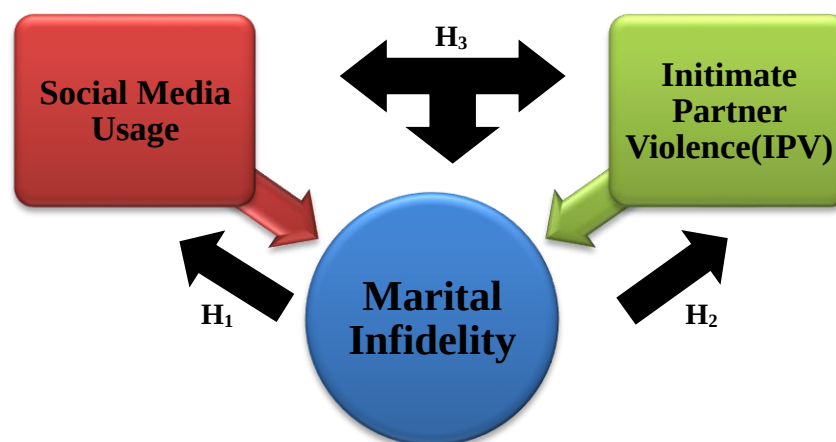


Diagram 2: Conceptual Model of the Study

METHOD

Design: The cross-sectional survey design was used as it is a research method that involves collecting data at a single point in time to analyse the relationships between variables within a given population. This design is particularly suitable because it allows for the examination of how social media usage correlates with experiences or perceptions of intimate partner violence and marital infidelity across a diverse group of married individuals within the defined population.

Participants: Participants comprised married persons residing in Benue State, Nigeria. Inclusion criteria included individuals who were married, separated, or divorced. Exclusion criteria included those unwilling to provide informed consent or with cognitive impairments that might hinder accurate responses. In details; the study sampled participants from four key locations in Benue State, Nigeria. These were: Adikpo, with 206 participants (23.8% of the sample), Oju, with 202 participants (23.3%), Makurdi, with 247 participants (28.5%), and Otukpo, with 212 participants (24.5%). This distribution ensured that the sample was geographically diverse. The total number of participants across these locations was 867.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 82 years. A majority of 842 participants (97.1%) provided their ages. This broad age range captures a wide spectrum of marital experiences. The sample was ethnically diverse, including the following groups: Tiv: 323 participants (37.3%), Idoma: 181 participants (20.9%), Iggede: 248 participants (28.6%), Igbo: 53 participants (6.1%), Hausa: 9 participants (1.0%), other ethnicities: 9 participants (1.0%). There were 44 participants (5.1%) who did not disclose their ethnicity.

The female participants totalled 472 (54.4%), while males made up 353 participants (40.7%). Gender information was missing for 42 participants (4.8%). Most participants (650 or 75.0%) reported being married and living together. Other marital statuses included: Married and living separately: 105 participants (12.1%), Divorced: 31 participants (3.6%), Widow/widower: 43 participants (5.0%), other statuses: 8 participants (0.9%). Marital status



information was missing for 30 participants (3.5%). The majority of respondents were in monogamous relationships (729 participants or 84.1%). Polygamous relationships were reported by 98 participants (11.3%), while relationship type was not disclosed by 40 participants (4.6%). The duration of participants' relationships ranged from 1 to 56 years. Information about relationship duration was available for 789 participants (92.0%), while 69 participants (8.0%) did not provide this information.

Settings: This study was conducted in Benue State, located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of the country, Nigeria often referred to as the Middle Belt. It was created on February 3, 1976, and derives its name from the Benue River, a significant geographical feature that runs through the state and contributes to its fertile lands and agricultural prominence. With a population of over five million people, the majority ethnic groups in are the Tiv, Idoma, and Igede, each with distinct languages, traditions, and cultural practices.

Procedure for Data Collection

A questionnaire was developed in four sections with Section A asking for general demographic information, Section B with 11 statements on Social Media Use, Section C with 29 statements on Intimate Partner Violence and Section D had statements on Marital Infidelity. The questionnaire response was designed in Likert scale format with Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3) and Strongly Disagree (4) with higher scores showing more favourable disposition to the characteristics and lower scores with lesser favourable disposition.

One thousand and ten (1012) copies of the questionnaire were administered to married people in four locations across Benue State taking cognisance of the three major (3) ethnic groups. Each location had two (2) research assistants (a male and a female) who were conversant with the terrains and spoke the local language. Sampling was purposive as only married people who volunteered to respond were administered copies of the questionnaire. Each of the four locations got 253 copies of the questionnaire administered to male and female married people. However, a total of 867 copies were duly completed for analysis.

Data Analysis: The data for this study were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage distribution, were employed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the participants. To address the hypotheses, correlations was used to assess if multicollinearity occurs between the variables. Further, simple linear and multiple linear regression analyses were used for hypothesis one and two while multiple regression analysis was utilised for testing hypothesis three.



RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing: Zero order correlations

Table 1: Showing the relationship among the variables in the study (social media use, intimate partner violence and marital infidelity) among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria

Variable	Social Use	Media	Intimate Partner Violence	Marital Infidelity	Mean	SD
Social Media Use	-				10.42	6.38
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)	.587**		-		40.88	14.03
Marital Infidelity	.656**		.813**	-	77.56	23.52

Result in table 1 shows the relationship among the independent variables - Social Media Use and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as well as the dependent variable - Marital Infidelity. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables in a regression model are highly correlated, which can distort the results. A high Pearson correlation coefficient, such as 0.95 between social media use and intimate partner violence, further indicates potential multicollinearity (O'Brien, 2022), but in this case, none of the correlation coefficient shows possibility of multicollinearity as all of them are less than 0.95.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant influence of social media on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression showing the influence of social media use and marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	B		
1	Marital Infidelity	Constant	51.680	1.451	35.615	.000
		Social Media Use	2.494	.120	.656	20.869 .000

Result in table 2 shows that there was a significant influence of social media use on marital infidelity among respondents [$\beta = .656$, $t = 20.869$; $p = .000$]. Observation further revealed a positive influence meaning that high use of social media increases the level of marital infidelity among respondents. Hypothesis one was therefore returned.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant influence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Table 3: Summary of simple linear regression showing the influence of intimate partner violence and marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	β		
1	Marital Infidelity	Constant	20.729	1.695		12.231 .000
		Intimate Partner Violence	1.406	.040	.813	35.307 .000

Result in table 3 shows that there was a significant influence of intimate partner violence on marital infidelity among respondents [$\beta = .813$, $t = 35.307$; $p = .000$]. Observation further revealed a positive influence meaning that high level of intimate partner violence increases the level of marital infidelity among respondents. Hypothesis two was therefore returned.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant joint influence of social media use and intimate partner violence on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of multiple regressions showing social media use and intimate partner violence on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria

DV	Predictor(s)	R	R ²	F	df	β	T	P
Marital Infidelity	Constant	.845	.713	658.268**	2, 529			
	Social Media Use					.262	8.860	<.001
	Intimate Partner Violence					.655	21.860	<.001

** $p < .001$

Result in table 4 shows that there was a significant joint influence of social media use and intimate partner violence on marital infidelity among respondents [$R = .845$; $R^2 = .713$; $F(2, 529) = 658.268$; $p < .001$]. Observation of coefficient of determination [$R^2 = .713$] shows that social media use and intimate partner violence significantly and jointly accounted for 71.3% of the total variance observed in marital infidelity among respondents. Hypothesis three was therefore returned.



DISCUSSIONS

Based on the regression analysis, it is concluded that social media use has a significant positive influence on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The results strongly support the hypothesis one that increased use of social media is associated with higher occurrences of marital infidelity. This finding suggests that social media contributes to the dynamics of marital relationships in ways that facilitate infidelity, possibly by providing opportunities for emotional or physical connections outside the marriage. For instance, this finding aligns with that of Abbasi (2018), who identified a connection between social networking sites (SNS) addiction and behaviours linked to adultery on SNSs. Analysis revealed that 36.24% of respondents agreed that infidelity could be controlled through social media, while 27.24% disagreed, 18.50% strongly agreed, and 17.99% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that respondents generally believe social media can play a role in controlling infidelity among married men. Additionally, experiences and studies have indicated that social media contributes significantly to infidelity in marriages, which often leads to divorce in contemporary society (Afolaranmi, 2020) and domestic violence in Nigeria. Moreover, this is consistent with other studies, such as the one conducted by Saleh & Mukhtar (2015), which explored the relationship between social media and divorce. Their findings revealed that a majority of individuals subscribed to one or more social networking sites recognise that these platforms can lead to infidelity, IPV, and divorce (Okhakhume et al., 2016).

For hypothesis two, based on the regression results, it can be concluded that intimate partner violence (IPV) has a significant positive influence on marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The data strongly support the hypothesis that IPV is a key factor in marital infidelity. The results suggest that the occurrence of IPV within marriages increases the likelihood of infidelity, potentially due to the emotional distress, power imbalances, and breakdown of trust that often accompany violent behaviours (Oguntola & Ibeh, 2023). Furthermore, outcomes may not be unconnected with economic hardship or poverty, misunderstandings between couples, lack of trust, un-submissiveness (specifically among wives), moral devaluation, impatience, illiteracy, greed, cultural norms, and traditions.

Hypothesis three showed that, social media and intimate partner violence (IPV) jointly influenced marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The results provide strong evidence supporting the hypothesis that both social media use and intimate partner violence jointly influence marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria. The model explains a substantial portion of the variance in marital infidelity (71.3%), and both predictors (social media use and IPV) are significant contributors to this outcome. Social media use, although influential, has a moderate impact on marital infidelity, while IPV has a stronger influence, suggesting that abusive behaviours within the marriage may play a more critical role in driving infidelity.

In summary, this study highlights that marital infidelity is not only influenced by the digital behaviours of individuals (such as social media use) but is also heavily shaped by the dynamics of abusive relationships or intimate partner violence, where violence creates an environment conducive to infidelity.



CONCLUSIONS

- i. Social media significantly influenced marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
- ii. Intimate partner violence (IPV) significantly influenced marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.
- iii. Social media and intimate partner violence jointly influenced marital infidelity among married persons in Benue State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and findings from your study, the following recommendations were made:

- Given the significant relationship between social media use and marital infidelity, it is recommended that educational programs be developed for married individuals and/or persons, particularly in different local government areas in Benue State, to promote responsible and healthy social media use. These programs should emphasise the risks associated with excessive use of social media, particularly in fostering emotional connections outside of the marriage, and offer strategies for maintaining a balanced and healthy digital presence. Awareness campaigns are needed also and should focus on the potential impact of social media on trust and relationship dynamics.
- Further, the study found that intimate partner violence (IPV) has a strong influence on marital infidelity. Therefore, it is recommended that intervention programs be implemented to address IPV within marriages. These programs should provide support services such as counselling, legal assistance, and immediate crisis management for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). Marriage counselling and conflict resolution workshops should also be offered to intending and married persons and couples to help mitigate the negative effects of violence in relationships and reduce the likelihood of infidelity.
- Since both social media use and IPV contributed to marital infidelity, improving communication and trust between partners is crucial. Couples should be encouraged to engage in open and honest communication about their digital interactions and any concerns related to social media usage or potential IPV. Marriage counselling services, which foster trust-building exercises and communication strategies, can be particularly beneficial in preventing infidelity. Developing a shared understanding of boundaries in both the digital and physical spaces is essential for preserving marital fidelity.
- Also, given the strong influence of IPV on marital infidelity, there is a need for policy reforms and legal protections for individuals affected by intimate partner violence. Policymakers should advocate for stricter laws and regulations that protect individuals from IPV and offer support mechanisms for victims, including shelters, financial support, and access to legal recourse. Public awareness campaigns should also be



launched to educate individuals about their rights and available support systems, reducing the societal stigma surrounding IPV and encouraging victims to seek help.

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